

[Document V.]

BY THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES,

February 20, 1844.

Read and ordered to be printed

COMMUNICATIONS

FROM

G. L. THOMPSON, Esq.

ENGINEER IN CHIEF U. S. NAVY,

RELATIVE TO

The Quantity and Quality of Coal most likely to be required.

AT THE

NAVY YARDS, AND BY THE WAR STEAMERS OF
THE UNITED STATES.

COMMUNICATIONS.

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT, U. S. N.

February 15th, 1844.

To the Hon. WM. W. MCKAIG,

House of Delegates, Md.

SIR:—Your's requesting information as to the probable amount of coal required for the Naval service of the United States, has been received, and would have been more promptly answered, had not a call of similar import been made by Congress, but could not be answered for want of the necessary information from Navy agents, and from other sources.

The resolutions of the House of Representatives were referred to my Department, and the report made thereon would have furnished you with all the information required. In the absence of these details, I will submit a few remarks which will enable you to form a correct opinion as to the quantity of coal most likely to be required at the Navy Yards and by the War steamers of the United States.

There are now in the service of the United States, five War steamers, and four heavy Iron steamers now building. Taking for example a steam ship of the class of the Missouri. When she left for Alexandria in Egypt, she received on board seven hundred tons of Cumberland coal; at Fayal she took 200 tons more; at Gibraltar, when the fatal accident occurred which caused her destruction, she was about taking in 300 tons more, making in all 1,200 tons of coal requisite for her outward bound voyage. It is true that the consumption of coal is very great, but there is no one of the War steamers, in proportion to its size, consumes less. Every effort is making by the Department to diminish the consumption, and if this be effected, the number of War steamers will be increased.

This would be unquestionably the policy of the United States. Great Britain has now about 124 War Steamers, France from 65 to 70, and even the Pasha of Egypt has thrice our number. Our entire Southern coast from the Chesapeake Bay to the mouths of the Mississippi, must be defended by heavy Steam batteries and War steamers. All attacks on the part of an approaching enemy

will be made by War steamers. The English Admiralty are well informed on the subject, and have accordingly made large depots of coal at several of the Bahama Islands, at the Havana and other points in the Gulf of Mexico, and it is somewhat singular that our War steamers have been compelled to purchase from the English, at some of the points of deposit, large quantities of coal at the high price of eight or nine dollars per ton.

An act of Congress recently passed, authorises the locating of depots of coal, and I have no doubt that this important subject will soon be acted on, and the necessary appropriations made for the purpose.

The Revenue service will also require a large supply. Iron Revenue cutters are now building, and they will no doubt be soon put in commission.

The quantity of coal now consumed at all the Navy Yards must increase, as each yard requires four or five Steam Engines constantly in operation, pumping dry docks, sawing, and other operations. I have used the Cumberland coal for some time in the Laboratory, and work-shop attached to my department, and require no better coal.

The peculiar fitness of this coal to generate Steam will be admitted by all. Its perfect adaptation, and the necessity of its use in all boilers made of copper, will at once recommend its universal use for all Marine Engines. The consumption of coal of the large number of English and French steamers which are already built, and about to visit our shores must be very great, furnishing an immediate market for large quantities.

There are other important items—not the least is Iron—its consumption is daily increasing, and the mineral products of the State of Maryland would find a ready market in the work-shops of our Navy Yards.

From a careful investigation of this subject, I am induced to believe that it would be a safe estimate to say that the United States for the purposes above mentioned, would on an average for the next ten years, become the annual consumer of at least one million of tons of coal, iron, &c., the products of the mineral region of the valley of the Potomac, provided the same would be delivered at Tide-water, from whence these products could be easily distributed to all our naval depots and yards.

All the particulars and data upon which the above calculations are predicated, are at your service.

And also, the report of this department, in reply to the resolutions of the House of Representatives above mentioned.

I am respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

G. L. THOMPSON,

Engineer in Chief United States Navy.

WASHINGTON, February 17th, 1844.

To the Hon. T. W. LIGON,

House of Delegates, Maryland.

SIR:—In compliance with the suggestion made when I had the pleasure of seeing you in Washington, permit me to make the following remarks, not directly applicable to the inquiries made by the Hon. Wm. W. McKaig, in his communication on the subject of coal.

The richness of the Cumberland coal, its friable nature will not bear transportation in Rail Road cars—by repeated handling it is readily reduced to fine coal, and its value very much reduced. The stokers and firemen on board of our War Steamers, find it difficult to manage as it requires the constant application of the slice bars of the firemen, and the intense heat of the Engine room ranging from 120° to 140° of Fah. thermometer, disinclines the firemen to use it and the fine coal is accordingly thrown away—the official report from the War Steamer Missouri gives a large percentage of waste.

I have proposed to the Hon. Secretary of the Navy, the propriety of sending an Engineer to inspect the coal at the mines, and I have no doubt this will be done, and when this inspection is commenced the French line of Steamers will immediately adopt the use of the Cumberland coal.

The French nation is extremely jealous of the English on this subject, as the export duty on coals is very considerable, France yielding but little coal they will take every means to supply themselves from this country.

It is also worthy of remark, that it is now under serious consideration in Pennsylvania, to impose a tax of fifty cents a ton on all coals sent out of the State, and I cannot perceive any injustice in this, as the cost of the article to the consumer would have been full one hundred per cent above its present price, had the Rail Roads and Canals not been constructed. It may not be politic to place this tax on as a tax “*eo nomine*”—it may be judicious only to advance the tolls on the canal.

I regret very much that the returns from the several Navy Yards have not been made. I shall however, do myself the pleasure of transmitting them if their contents are interesting.

I sincerely hope, that the Legislature of Maryland will take some decided steps in this important matter, I should regret extremely to see her hesitating in so important an undertaking, when so nearly completed. That it is her true interest to complete the work, and that she will be indemnified, I have no doubt.

Your obedient servant,

G. L. THOMPSON.

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BY THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES,
February 21, 1844.

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R E P O R T

OF THE

S E L E C T C O M M I T T E E ,

TO WHICH WAS REFERRED THE ENQUIRY

Whether the Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland

STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY,

AND THE

CHESAPEAKE AND DELAWARE CANAL COMPANY,

HAVE NOT

FORFEITED THEIR CHARTERS.

ANNAPOLIS:
RILEY & DAVIS, PRINTERS.

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1844.

